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ABSTRACT

The peer coaching program described in this paper was designed to promote a teacher self-directed system which established sharing with colleagues through team planning and classroom observation and feedback. While the ultimate goal of the program was to improve instruction and, thereby, to increase student learning, the program also facilitated the exchange of teaching methods and materials, provided teachers with regular positive feedback on their classroom performance from their peers, helped teachers to focus on instructional goal achievement, and relieved the isolation of the classroom. In preparation for the program, 41 teachers (of a total of 133 staff members) attended workshops that provided guidance in teacher observation and feedback skills and discussions on effective teaching and on evaluation methods. Unique features of the program included teachers providing support for their colleagues and assuming responsibility for their professional growth, and the teachers chosing their own coach or coaches rather than having them assigned. A description is given of the peer coaching process and the development of the program. A year-end evaluation of the program is reported, based on interviews with four case studies of participants in the program, two questionnaires completed by the participants, and interviews with division chairpersons and the principal. (JD)

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INSTRUCTIONAL GROWTH THROUGH PEER COACHING

Petra Munro

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The Instructional growth of teachers is an important concern of administrators and staff developers. Current research has uncovered strong links between teacher action and student learning (Brophy, 1983,Rosenshine, 1983). Studies of teacher effectiveness have identified specific classroom management practices, instructional techniques and expectations that appear to help many students raise achievement. (Brophy, 1983). Although effectiveness research is not absolute, the research has provided some clues as to what is important when attempting to improve classroom learning. With research suggesting the factors which constitute an effective teacher, one problem facing staff developers is how to encourage teachers to apply these effective teaching strategies into their classrooms. Motivating teachers to reassess their effectiveness is often a difficult and a frustrating experience for staff developers.

Traditionally, direct classroom supervision and teacher in-service have been the primary methods of improving teacher instruction. Research conducted by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers suggest that supervision and in-service are not necessarily effective in facilitating permanent change in teacher instruction. Primarily, because these means do not permit for the constant and regular feedback required for

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instructional change. The program described in this paper focuses on a methodology which allows for consistent teacher feedback to facilitate long term teacher behavioral changes which improve instruction.

Peer Coaching, as described in this work, was a method of improving teacher effectiveness whereby teachers worked with one or more colleagues to achieve specific instructional goals through a process of regular observation and on feedback. The peer coaching program implemented at Forest View High School in Arlington Heights, Illinois in 1985 was not only successful, but offers a methodology which promotes teachers as their own staff developers. The ultimate goal of the peer coaching program was to increase student learning through improved and more finely tuned instruction. The program was not designed to remediate substandard teachers but to promote the continued growth of effective classroom instruction.

The second goal of the program was to facilitate the exchange of teacher methods and materials. Instructional sharing, in addition to creating a more positive collegial atmosphere and encouraging team planning is considered an important element in improving the effectiveness of teachers.

The third goal was to provide a mechanism in which teachers could receive more regular positive feedback for their classroom performance. Peer coaching would provide affermation of the effective job most teachers do on a daily basis.

The fourth goal of the peer coaching program was to help teachers focus on instructional goal achievement and consequently develop classroom methods which enhance student learning.

The final goal was to breakdown the "privacy rule" which inhibits sharing of ideas and classroom experiences by keeping teachers isolated. It was believed that by having teachers observe other colleagues that they would begin to reevaluate their own teaching techniques and become more comfortable with other peers in their classrooms.

From the beginning it was necessary to divorce the peer coaching program from the contractual evaluation process. The peer coaching program was intended to establish a collegial atmosphere which promoted instructional goal achievement based on effective teaching research, the techniques of which enhanced student learning. Peer coaching was designed to promote a teacher self-directed system which established collegial sharing through team planning and classroom observation and feedback. The program was designed to promote shared responsibility for professional growth.

THE PEER COACHING PROCESS

The peer coaching program began in 1984 when as a part of their self-evaluation, teachers were asked to observe or be observed by a colleague. In the Spring of 1985, teachers were given the opportunity to participate in the Peer Coaching Program the following year. The participants were informed that this would entail participating in an effective teaching 2-day workshop in which they would assess their own current

strengths and weaknesses as teachers, review the effective teaching practices, develop areas of potential professional growth, and develop observation and feedback skills. The culminating activity of this workshop was the development of an action plan which contained strategies to achieve classroom instructional goals which would lead to more effective student learning. Teachers were also informed that throughout the year they would be working with a colleague of their choice, mutually observing one another on a regular basis and giving non-evaluative feedback. Due to the time needed to observe and have conferences with peer partners, teachers were informed that participants would be released from their hall duty assignment for one semester. This was a duty in which teachers sat in various parts of the building to control student traffic through the halls.

Out of 133 certified staff members, 41 teachers chose to participate in the peer coaching program. In August, the 41 participating teachers met with the Director of the program to complete the first day of the 2-day workshop. The workshop had several goals, stating the objectives of the program, presenting the research on effective teaching, conducting teacher self-assessment, teaching observation and feedback skills, and beginning the writing of an action plan which would describe the teacher's instructional improvement goals.

This full day workshop was followed by a three hour workshop at the end of September in which effective teaching skills were discussed by a guest speaker.

Action plans were completed and the first classroom observations were discussed by the peer coaching teams.

In the first weeks of October, the director met with each of the program participants in order to discuss and refine their action plans and to assess any technical needs for success with the classroom observation and feedback skills. Throughout the school year (October through May) Peer Coaching Teams were encouraged to make two observations per month and to fill out monthly goal sheets which would help them focus on a part of their action plan. In order to establish some form of accountability and keep abreast of the progress of the program, the director of the program met with the coach teams on a bimonthly basis. The participants were also requested to take part in a mid-year and end-of-year evaluation.

The Peer Coaching Program at Forest View differed from other coaching programs reported in the literature in that teacher's chose their coach or coaches from among their colleagues. In other coaching programs (Showers 1985 and Afonso 1973) one or several teachers are trained to perform coaching services. Teachers involved in the peer coaching program must work with the trained peer coach rather than choosing a colleague of their choice. Another significant difference is that many coaching programs are used to aid in the transfer of newly acquired skills after in-service training in specific instructional methods such as Madeline Hunter's ITEP. The goal of the coaching in these programs is specifically to observe and collect data on the correct usage and transfer of a particular instructional method. In the Forest View program, although effective teaching methods were presented in a workshop,

instructional goals to be observed by the coaching teams had not been predetermined.

The uniqueness of the Forest View Peer Coaching Program was that it encouraged teachers to provide support for their colleagues and to assume responsibility for their professional growth. Peer coaching provided the regular observations and feedback necessary for instructional growth not possible under other models. Utimately, the goal of the program was to increase student learning through employment of effective teaching practices.

In as much as the peer coaching program at Forest View was designed to allow teachers to determine effective teaching goals which will improve instruction, a study was conducted aimed at gaging the effects of peer coaching on the teachers' achievement of their instructional goals and ascertaining the effect peer coaching plays in the acquisition of new skills or the fine tuning of existing skills on the part of the participating teachers. It was assumed but not imperically tested in the study that effective teaching strategies when appled in the classroom would increase student learning.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results of this one year study are based on interviews with four case studies of participants in the peer coaching program, two questionnaires completed by all the participants and interviews with the division chairpersons and the principal.

Since the success of the peer coaching program was directly related to the accomplishment of instructional goals, it was necessary to examine the nature of these of goals. Based on the effectiveness research completed by Rosenshine (1983) and Brophy (1983), the instructional goals of the participants were classified to determine whether they reflected effective teacher behavior or not. Of the 38 action plans, there was a total of 71 goals, 10 of those goals proved not to fit into the effective teaching behavior research. Those goals which were not categorized as being effective behavior were primarily goals made from teachers in the counseling department.

Comparison of the Number of Goals and Effective Teaching Behaviors

EFFECTIVE TEACHING BEHAVIOR	# OF GOALS IN ACTION PLAN
STUDENT INVOLVEMENT	
Increasing time on task	19
Coverage	0
STUDENT SUCCESS	
Increasing Feedback	3
Increasing Positive Reinforcement	7
TEACHER PLANNING	
Include Higher Level Thinking Skills	2
Using New Materials	4
Reassessing Amount of Material Covered	1
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	
Presenting Rules and Expectations Clearly	5
Increasing Movement in Classroom	3
TEACHER INSTRUCTION	
Articulating Expectations	1
Increasing Checks for Understanding	4
Improving Effectiveness andLevel of Questioning	6
Changing Instructional Method	5
Improving Group Work	1

The major concern of the study was to determine whether these instructional goals had been accomplished and what role peer coaching played in the achievement of these goals. Data on the goal achievement was collected in the interviews with the case studies and the two evaluation questionnaires administered to the whole group.

In the mid-year questionnaire, 87% of the participants stated that they had made significant progress toward the achievement of their goals. Based on the data, 93% of the participants stated that peer coaching had helped in goal achievement. When asked to compare goal achievement to previous year, 87% stated that peer coaching had made a significant difference in goal achievement compared to previous years.

At the end of the year, a second questionnaire was distributed to the participants, 97% stated that they had accomplished their instructional goals, and 88% stated that peer coaching had made a significant difference in goal achievement compared to previous years. 94% of the participants stated that peer coaching had been more helpful in achieving instructional goals than direct classroom supervision.

The higher rate of instructional goal achievement was attributed primarily to the regularity of observations. The case studies interviewed reported that peer coaching resulted in a higher "on task" behavior toward accomplishing goals because knowing that someone was coming in once or twice a month made them more conscientious of working on their goals. Goal achievement was also facilitated by the helpful feedback and suggestions from peer coaches. In addition, the process of observing another teacher also simulated growth. Participants reported that observing another teacher

automatically initiated a process of self-evaluation. The process of observing a peer leads teachers to reflect on their own classroom strategies and teaching methods.

Of major significance to the results of the program was the number of observations that each coaching team made. At the end of the peer coaching year, the participants were asked to record the total number of observations and conferences for the year. The average number of observations was 12.6 and the average number of conferences was 17. The lowest number of recorded observations was 7 and the highest was 38 observations during the year. Peer coaching participants were, on the average, observed six times as much as those not participating in the program.

The participants who were interviewed were asked to compare instructional goal achievement in peer coaching to the achievement of goals under direct classroom supervision by supervisors. Those interviewed stated the frequency of observations by peers and the high comfort level with peers, which allowed for open discussion of problems and concerns, lead to a much higher rate of instructional growth than when working with supervisors. Several of the teachers interviewed felt that just one or two visits per year by the supervisor had no impact on their teaching. They saw the purpose of observations by supervisors as being evaluative, not as a method to improve instruction. Those interviewed concluded that peer coaching was much more helpful in facilitating instructional growth than traditional supervision.

In addition to increasing the number of observations and facilitating goal achievement, the peer coaching program had several other effects. In the mid-year evaluation, participants were asked if peer coaching was providing more opportunities

for sharing instructional methods than in the past. As a result of peer coaching, 93% of the participants felt that peer coaching was providing more opportunities for sharing instructional methods. One coaching team in Social Studies began writing course outcomes and tests together. Another coaching team from the Math/Science department began coordinating their advanced math and physics classes so that concepts taught in math could be applied concurrently in physics.

The interviews and questionnaires also suggested that peer coaching resulted in the breaking down of the "privacy rule". In fact, one participant commented, by the end of the year "my classroom had a revolving door, teachers were coming in and out of the classroom all the time and I wouldn't think twice about it." Participants did express some initial anxiety during the first observations; however, it became apparent that the anxiety due to being observed by a peer quickly resided after several observations. In fact, many participants found observation to be a wonderful growth experience and a source of regeneration. Observing a peer served as a new source of ideas and energy. Participants also commented that it was reassuring to see that other teachers had the same type of "problem" students and were confronted with similar discipline problems. Through sharing common problems and frustrations, participating teachers felt less alone and acquired the support to face daily challenges with new enthusiasm.

In addition to providing collegial support, coaching also provided much needed positive reinforcement. One participant interviewed commented that "peer coaching confirmed that what I was doing in the classroom was right." Much of the feedback received in the conference sessions after observations was positive and a

reaffirmation that what teachers were doing was effective in promoting student learning. For most teachers accustomed to receiving only occasional feedback, the continual positive reinforcement received through peer coaching was a very rewarding aspect of the peer coaching program.

The interviews and questionnaires regarding the peer coaching program also revealed some concerns. The most common concern was shortage of time for observations and conferences. In the second semester, substitutes were provided once a month in order to allow for more observations. It was also suggested that the master schedule be arranged so as to prevent conflicting schedules of coaching partners.

Another concern voiced by the participants was the need for increasing their repetoire of observation and feedback skills. During the August orientation meeting, different methods of observation had been presented and teachers had also been given the opportunity to practice scripting while observing a videotape of someone teaching. However, participants recommended that in addition, role playing to develop feedback and data collection techniques might have been helpful.

The evaluations completed by the participants also provided valuable suggestions for future programs. It was suggested that the program rather than being a year long include the option of changing partners at mid-year, thus allowing for a greater variety of feedback. Another recommendation for future programs was to encourage coaching teams that are cross-disciplinary. Many teachers felt that understanding of the subject area was not essential to observation; in fact teachers felt

that much could be learned by observing teachers in different subject areas where different methods are used.

In the final evaluation of the peer coaching program, teachers were asked "Would you participate in peer coaching again if a program was offered?" 82% of the participants responded that they would participate in a peer coaching program again. Most of the participants attributed the success of the program to the sense of accomplishment and instructional growth they felt as a result of increased achievement of instructional goals. In addition, through sharing their expertise and re-establishing respect for their colleagues, participants experienced a rekindling of professionalism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for peer coaching to be effective in improving instruction, it is essential to identify the role of peer coaching in staff development and plan conscientiously. Another crucial element to ensuring a successful peer coaching program is the support of administrative staff. For schools implementing a peer coaching program we offer the following recommendations:

- Involvement in peer coaching should be kept voluntary. Those involved in the program should also be permitted to choose their partner or partners.
- Initially an incentive for participation should be provided.

- Instructional goals for improvement should be determined by teachers themselves.

- Participants should be trained in basic observation and feedback skills.

- System of accountability for observations and conferences in order to provide structure for participants.

- Periodic sharing session where all coaches can discuss experiences.

- Allow for opportunity to change partners and encourage interdisciplinary teams.

- The program should have a facilitator responsible for coordinating peer coaching teams, setting up accountability system, managing scheduling, and arranging substitutes.

As a staff development program for improving instruction, the Forest View peer coaching has the advantage of being low cost and needing minimal supervision. Future staff development programs will be strengthened if they include the peer coaching component. Peer coaching provides a collegial atmosphere that promotes risk taking and allows teachers to continuously engage in the study of their craft.

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